

# HOW TO MANAGE YOUR TEACHING TIME aka “There’s no time for this today”

## Opening questions for the reader before reading:

- How detailed time plans do you make for your teaching sessions?
- How strongly do you stick to your time plans usually and if not, why?
- How do you decide what activities get the most time in your teaching sessions?
- How much time do you plan in your sessions for learners’ questions, discussion, interaction?
- How long does it take for new knowledge to set in the learner’s brain?

Time is always an issue, there is never enough time to go deeper into the topics, for the learners to fully understand them. How can we deal with the constant problem of time running out?

First thing is probably to accept the fact that we will always be running out of time and there will always be topics that didn't get discussed at the session. Even if we plan more time, we will simply find more things to discuss. And this is not necessarily a bad thing. The feeling of wanting to know more, ask more, discuss more is actually something that we aim for in learning situations, so sparking that interest and getting the feeling of "I don't know enough of this" is a good outcome. This means that learners might be willing to go and learn more about the topic themselves later on.

Maybe what we need to change is our expectations and relationship with time, especially how we use the time in our teaching sessions. In the end managing time means managing the content you teach and how you teach it.

### Some thoughts on time:

- The most important is to address issues that are **on learners' minds** during the session, when they are thinking about the topic at hand. It's better to dig deeper into something that learners don't understand and are eager to discuss, rather than run through everything you planned and maybe lose your learners' attention/interest in the process.
- At the same time we don't have to follow all the ideas that learners have. For some topics that get too big or detailed, we can say that this would need a separate session (time) on its own, giving specific reasons for it, maybe some resources where to look for more info. It is the balance to find what aspects of the topic can be discussed so that learners can think about the elements they are interested in and at the same time keep within in the general topic you wanted to tackle.
- It is very difficult to actually change someone's mind in only one hour or less (it's simply how our brain works), which is the time often given to us for presentations, especially when we also don't have time to create proper connection with our participants (for example in online contexts). But even if we cannot make people accept new knowledge, we can always use this time to **get to know their thoughts** and pre-existing knowledge on the topic. Even in online workshops, we can ask questions through polls or chat and that at least gives us a better sense of how our audience perceives this topic and we can use this information in the future.
- As educators we tend to overcrowd our sessions with our own knowledge and content, where there is not much room for the learners to digest the new information (to encode it). Depending on the context and specific nature of the lesson, the time allocation could be different, but it could be good to plan around  $\frac{2}{3}$  **of your time for discussion** and questions of the learners with possibilities to discover and construct new knowledge, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  for your own talk and expert information. Remember, the brain is not a voice recorder, it needs time to connect new information with existing pre-knowledge and if needed, start re-constructing incorrect ideas.

Our experience of the flow of time is subjective depending on how we feel about the situation we are in. As educators we usually sense it a bit differently than our learners. If the topic is new to them, then they need the pace of the lesson to be **much slower** than to us, the experts, because they process that information more slowly. Also, when we get a little bit nervous, we tend to start speaking faster. So although we might feel that there is so much we need to cover in one session, we actually need to take a slower pace so that the learners would be able to follow us. Asking more questions instead of simply providing information is a good way for slowing down, as it both helps to see where learners might be struggling and it also can calm us, and our speed of talking gets slower. On how to design questions to ask from your learners, you can check the *Why are questions important?* chapter.

## Time and the basic psychological needs

Time is tricky because pressing with time can also be a form of control and can suppress the learners' need for autonomy, because they need to feel there is time for their questions and confusions. They need time to think and discover the answers, solutions and ideas themselves, in other words, to deeply understand. Then again, a commonly agreed and set timeframe also offers structure in the learning setting and that supports the feeling of competence – the feeling that I know what is going on. So perhaps we should see **time management more as a dialogue** between the educator and learners:

- If there is an interesting discussion going on and time is running out, the educator can pause for the moment and ask whether everyone would prefer to stay a bit longer in the session to finish the discussion or finish on time, so that the learners themselves can decide what is more important at that moment. This might also mean continuing the discussion later and that in turn could mean changing the initial plan of the educator.
- Depending on the possibilities, the educator could also offer choices on which specific topic to continue within the broader topic at hand. For example, if there are different interesting questions being discussed, the educator could give the learners the option to vote which they want to discuss and which the educator could later provide written information on.
- In all this it's also important to explicitly communicate and explain this way of teaching and managing time to the learners and why it is done differently than perhaps what they are used to.



## Some tips for a better relationship with time

- Don't overcrowd your session with information. The aim of the session is not to run through all the slides that you had but to help people learn new things. Learners need to feel that they have time to think and learn. So we as educators should adapt ourselves to their pace, not them to our pace.
- Time is precious for both you and the learners, so make it meaningful for both. Ask your learners what they want to know. If you teach them something they are interested in, then it's also time better spent for you.
- Accept that there will always be a level of unexpectedness in your teaching sessions. Accept that you will not be able to talk about all the important things you wanted. Once we start to let go of that need for control, we also become more relaxed, more interested in what our learners actually think about things and our teaching becomes more deep and meaningful. And paradoxically we may end up actually teaching much more.
- If you use slides, you can plan them not as a final structure for your session, but as a pool of information on your topic that you can pick based on the needs and interests of the learners – information that you can either skip or add, depending on how the discussion goes.
- For how to plan time for different activities in your session you can check the example learning session format in the *Trainer's checklist*.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Before reading the answer, think to yourself: **how would you answer this?**

**What if learners themselves get anxious around time and expect the educator to “finish all the slides” so they could get all the information planned for the session?**

As we are so used to workshops being about “passing on the information” and just following the slides of the educator, the feeling of not seeing all of those slides can create some disappointment. But this is again one of the learning illusions. Having seen all the slides and actually learning the topic that was on the slides are of course not the same things. This is something that us as the educators probably need to explain explicitly: we have the structure, general idea and expert knowledge of the topic, but we are here for the learners, their interests and their pace and that can mean not talking about all the planned topics, but making sure that what gets talked about, is discussed thoroughly and made sure that everyone understands it.

## Ending questions for the reader to reflect upon:

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- What parts in this chapter were most confusing or difficult for you to understand? Why do you think it was so?
- As a learner, what do you experience more: too much time taken for discussions or not enough time? How does it make you feel in those sessions?
- As an educator, what do you tend to do more: putting too much time on discussions or not enough? Why do you think so? Would you want to change it? Why or why not?
- What do you want to take with you from this chapter?
- If and what next steps do you want to take in your work regarding this topic?
- What do you want to know more about?

